



PROJECT ROME

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Editorial

As predicted last month the Greater Manchester Combined Authority decided to choose one of their own to be their new Chief Executive Officer. Eamonn Boylan knows all the local politicians and business leaders well following a long stint as Deputy to Howard Bernstein at Manchester and a more recent spell running Stockport Council. He will no doubt be busy preparing briefs for the new Mayor who is due to be elected in just 10 weeks time. At the most recent debate involving the main candidates in Manchester Town Hall front runner Andy Burnham made several commitments regarding public transport.

Ratcheting up his rhetoric he promised to stop the bus companies 'fleecing' passengers



Eamonn Boylan

implying he would want to use the increased powers of regulation that will be available to him. He also expressed an ambition to provide free bus transport across the

City region for those aged 18 and under. Observers of the debate were surprised that Tory Mayoral candidate Sean Anstee allowed himself to be portrayed as the candidate of the political establishment of Greater Manchester (which is predominately Labour), seemingly defending every previous action of the Combined Authority on which he sits as Leader of Trafford Council . One commented ' ... Sean needs to raise his game and not allow Andy Burnham to present himself as the insurgent candidate'



Andrew Jones MP

Meanwhile Harrogate MP, Transport Minister and Yorkshire County Cricket Club member Andrew Jones told the third annual UK bus summit in London that the Government would seek to reverse in the House of Commons amendments passed to the Bus Services Bill by the Lords.

These would extend franchising powers to all transport authorities not just those with elected Mayors. He implied that he wanted this all done and dusted by the time of the Mayoral elections. This timetable is looking increasingly challenging given that two months after the first reading of the bill in the House of Commons there is still no sign of a second reading date.

One Tory transport expert in the Commons remarked the following:

'It is all a bit ironic that New Labour resisted bus franchising for 13 years despite pressure

from their backbenchers and the trade unions. Now we are trying to implement it not because of any market analysis but basically so we can offer it as an incentive to northern Labour councils to adopt the Mayoral model. It will be interesting to see if any of my Tory colleagues representing the Shires conclude, like the Lords, that if it is good enough for the urban areas it should also be an option for the Counties of England and Wales'.

Meanwhile one senior Labour Councillor in West Yorkshire had a rather different perspective on the debate, stating that:

'If we wanted to seriously control local bus timetables and services the most effective thing to do would be to put in a bid to buy out the local operations of the dominant companies. The savings in subsidies would be considerable. The Government will continue to resist granting powers to municipalities to set up their own bus companies but in my view more public sector comparators would intensify competition'.



Louise Ellman MP

Peers of the realm will of course over the coming weeks be turning their attention to the Brexit bill. In the Commons seven Northern Labour MP's rebelled against Jeremy Corbyn's Labour whip to support the triggering of Article 50 including Transport Select Committee Chair, Louise Ellman.

Louise was joined in the North West by Liverpool's Luciana Berger and Stockport's Anne Coffey. Newcastle upon Tyne boasted



two rebels with Catherine McKinnell and Chi Onwura as did the White Rose County with Wakefield's Mary Creagh and York's Rachael Maskell. Conversely in Leeds Liberal Democrat MP and Chair of Parliament's All Party Rugby League Group Greg Mulholland took no notice of his own Party Leader's advice and voted to support the invoking of Article 50.

February 2017 also saw the emergence of two Labour female MP's representing constituencies in the Manchester City Region Angela Rayner and Rebecca Long Bailey (promoted to Shadow Business Secretary) as being potential left wing candidates to take over from their current leader. In addition Wansbeck MP and former National Union of Miners boss Ian Lavery was given the poisoned chalice of running Labour's General Election Campaign previously held by Hemsworth's Jon Trickett.



Angela Rayner MP



Rebecca Long-Bailey MP



Finally, news emerged that early in March all the Chief Executives and Council Leaders in Yorkshire will meet together in the same room, for the first time in a number of years. No breakthrough on devolution is expected overnight but any sign of a rapprochement will be keenly watched for. Minds might be concentrated by the IPPR North think tank report, which has just highlighted that the county is facing a growing East-West divide on transport investment alongside the long standing gulf compared to the capital. Yorkshire and the Humber will see transport spending worth £190 per person over the next five years compared to £682 in the North West. A further twist is that Barnsley MP and ex soldier Dan Jarvis has let it be known that he will be devoting time in the coming weeks to trying to find a practical way forward for devolution in Yorkshire and the Humber. If he can achieve that speculation about his own credentials as a future Labour leader this will no doubt intensify.